





**Business Process Management for Accounts Payable:**Gaining Control Over Documents, Automating Processes, and Optimizing Cash Flow and the Bottom Line



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# INTRODUCTION

Many organizations want to fundamentally change the role of their Accounts Payable (AP) departments and make them more strategic—shifting AP from a clerical, transaction-oriented reactive process to a vibrant and well-oiled machine, one that is both analytical and proactive.

Business Process Management (BPM) achieves this goal by allowing companies to replace their traditional, paper-based, labor-intensive practices of invoice processing, routing, and approvals with an efficient and automated approach. This shift ultimately means that Accounts Payable is freed to focus on higher-value tasks, such as quality assurance, contract and policy compliance, reporting, and process improvement analysis.

Global 360 has a proven Business Process Management Solution specifically designed for Accounts Payable that enables firms to improve operations by:

- 1. Reducing invoice processing turnaround times
- Automating many process steps
- 3. Ensuring all related information is accessible
- 4. Enabling prioritization of invoice processing order
- 5. Increasing visibility and control of AP processes
- 6. Providing the capability for sophisticated and flexible cash management
- Enabling proactive, strategic, and optimized management capabilities

## ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND THE BOTTOM LINE

AP is a unit within a company's financial structure that is dedicated to effectively and efficiently identifying, capturing, and paying the liabilities (amounts owed) of the organization. Because many vendors offer discounts for early payments and impose penalties for late ones, AP is also a timesensitive function. Failure to manage this function effectively results in real costs (penalties) as well as opportunity costs (failure to obtain discounts) that can substantially alter the financial picture of any organization, large or small.

Unfortunately, while many organizations have negotiated favorable terms and prompt payment discounts from their vendors (often 2-3%), they are often unable to actually process the invoices within the designated time period and qualify for the discount. The reason? AP processes are traditionally riddled with inefficiencies and labor-intensive steps. These processes are extremely paper intensive and usually require numerous hand-offs. Exception handling requires even more verification and time consuming review

# **KEY STATISTICS**

Average time to process a vendor payment: 6 days

The average cost to process a vendor payment \$8.15

Average number of invoices processed per month by an AP staff member: 2651

Number of firms that pay invoices within specified terms 90% of the time: 55%

Percent of companies who have used an AP audit firm within the past 3 years: 32%

Moving to a low/medium level of automation increases the number of invoices processed per month by 20%

Moving to a high level of automation increases the number of invoices processed per month by 40%

than normal processes and cannot be skimped on. Most organizations are unable to systematically prioritize invoice processing to ensure those with favorable terms are processed first.

# THE CHALLENGES IN ACCOUNTS PAYABLE



# **DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES**

**Volume of Invoices** Organizations receive hundreds of thousands (and sometimes millions) of invoices annually—both with and without POs. Each invoice has numerous associated documents.



**Incongruous Data** Most companies receive invoices by multiple means, including e-mail, fax, via web forms, and most commonly, as paper documents sent by snail mail, which translates to manual processing.

Paper Overload Accounts Payable is a document-intensive function by nature. Organizations struggle to find efficient ways to manage, store, and access a high volume of documents, and find their current manual handling to be error prone and difficult to track.

**Poor Document Management** Invoices tend to stack up until someone has time to get to the filing. Invoices often get pulled for vendor inquiries and either never get put back or get misfiled. Audits, whether internal, IRS, or Sales Taxoriented, occur unexpectedly, and require the rapid searching for, pulling, and re-filing of invoices. And, as if this wasn't enough, organizations must factor in the high cost of storage.

#### **PROCESS CHALLENGES**

Inefficient Processes Accounts Payable processes are complex, dynamic, and intertwined throughout an organization. Numerous hand offs, and mazes of paper-based approval processes and sign offs, slow down productivity across the entire organization. Long cycle times mean late payment penalties and an inability to take advantage of early payment discounts.

**Exception Handling** Invoice exceptions are lowest in actual incidence volume, but can be the most costly to process. Enabling AP staff to identify non-standard invoices for additional auditing and special handling as quickly as possible is essential.

**Sorting and Distribution Errors** Invoices are often distributed to the wrong person, resulting in additional delays in getting the invoice into the system.

**Disparate Systems** PO's and receivers are often on disparate systems and manual matching is both time consuming and error prone. There is no way to track discrepancies themselves or the way in which these discrepancies are eventually resolved.

**Poor Invoice Hand-Off Management** Tracking invoices through the approval process, and making sure the necessary hand-offs to multiple approvers takes place, can be challenging to implement effectively.

# **BUSINESS OPTIMIZATION CHALLENGES**

**Lack of Visibility** Managers cannot get the reports on payable status and process performance that they need to effectively manage their departments.

Lack of Control Managers need to manage cash strategically. For example, sometimes taking discounts for early payments of invoices is advantageous, while other times keeping cash longer is more strategic. The ability to tailor payments to respond to current business conditions is critical.

**Compliance Challenges** Providing accurate data for financial statements, and meeting the disclosure and auditing mandates for regulations like Sarbanes-Oxley, is impossible without process transparency and robust records management.

# **CUSTOMER SUCCESS: ADIDAS**

**Challenge** Improve accuracy of Cash Forecasting **Solution** Better align Payables to Receivables

Challenge Reduce paper handling Solution Install document imaging

**Challenge** Increase productivity

**Solution** Reduce time spent on clerical functions such as sorting, routing, retrieving, paying, and filing invoices

**Challenge** Improve document and process flow control **Solution** Implement systemic documentation process flows (controlled by user-defined business rules)

**Challenge** Increase accessibility to real-time information **Solution** Allow Vendors/Suppliers secure, real-time, on-line access to their payment information

**Challenge** Improve Vendor relations by meeting payment deadlines **Solution** Automatically push invoices through the user-defined approval process

**Challenge** Improve Cash standing by ensuring that Vendor discounts are taken

**Solution** Automate the invoice approval process

Challenge Increase the use of electronic interfaces

**Solution** EDI (electronic Data Interchange), ERS (Evaluated Receipt Settlement), EIPP (Electronic Invoice Presentation from Payment)

**Challenge** Increase real-time reporting capabilities **Solution** Aged items, throughput time, processed and backlog volumes



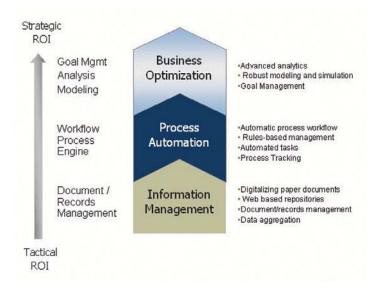
# OPTIMIZING ACCOUNTS PAYABLE: THE PROMISE OF THE GLOBAL 360 AP BPM SOLUTION TEMPLATE

The top priorities for an Accounts Payable department are:

- 1. Process invoices quickly and accurately
- 2. Work smart: invoices from vendors with favorable terms and early payment discounts should be paid first
- 3. Manage cash strategically
- 4. Provide accurate reporting/auditing for financial statements and regulatory compliance

All BPM Accounts Payable Solutions address some of these priorities, but Global 360's solution is the only one that addresses all of them.

#### Three Tiers of BPM for Accounts Payable



Tier One Many "BPM solutions" on the market today are actually imaging solutions—they enable Accounts Payable departments to gain control over the myriad of documents involved in their processes by digitizing paper documents, creating web-based repositories, providing document and records management functions, and creating data aggregation capabilities. This is unquestionably a "must have" component of BPM for Accounts Payable, but it's only a piece of the overall solution.

**Tier Two** True BPM for Accounts Payable addresses not only the document side of the house, but also the workflow and rules-based management functionality that gives business users the ability to determine business process workflow—including manual and fully-automated tasks. Users configure, reuse, maintain, and fine-tune business processes and determine the rules for how their processes will be executed

and who will perform the steps within the process. (Note: Global 360 believes this is an ideal first stage of a BPM deployment).

Tier Three Advanced BPM for Accounts Payable builds on tier two by adding strategic business optimization. BPM offers advanced analytics, robust modeling, and simulation, along with excellent goal management capabilities that give Accounts Payable managers the ability to leverage intelligent process management and tie together their business fundamentals with their key corporate goals.

The Global 360 Business Process Management Accounts Payable Solution Template encompasses all three tiers to map directly to AP's top priorities.

#### **IMAGING AND DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT**

#### **CHALLENGES**

- Paper-intensive processes
- Time and resource issues for maintaining paper files
- Storage of invoices, PO's, receipts and additional back-up paperwork
- Retrieving invoices from storage
- Providing AP information for audit purposes

Processing invoices is by nature a document-intensive function. For companies seeking to improve both their Accounts Payable efficiencies and records management capabilities, the first issue that must be tackled is how to manage the high volume of documents associated with invoice processing.

Accounts Payable documents may be received in a variety of formats including faxes, e-mails, web forms, and paper-based documents. Organizations often struggle to consolidate and manage disparate documents so that Accounts Payable staff have access to them and are able to track them for timely payment. If some of the documents are paper-based, there are even more issues because processing is slow, labor intensive, and error prone and efforts to synchronize information across concurrent users is almost impossible.

The result of these challenges is that document tracking is complex, unreliable, and lacks needed transparency. Accounts Payable staff spend too much time tracking down related documents in disparate locations and the review, revision, and approval cycles are slow and resource-intensive. There is lag time in hand-offs among team members, which can mean payment discount windows are not met, or even worse, late payments incur penalties.



# GLOBAL 360 AP SUCCESS STORY: UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

# **Challenges:**

University departments unable to track payment status

Yearly audit process time-consuming, costly, and complicated

Large, manual, paper-based processing operation falling short due to increased volume

#### Goals:

Create University-wide process to transmit, track, and complete Accounts Payable activities

#### **Results:**

Improved turn-around time for vendor payment: Reduced from 25 days to 3 days

1,500 checks processed every day

Audit completed 30 percent faster, more accurately and efficiently

Improved security

#### ROI

Increased volume supported by same size staff

Streamlined process and eliminated repetitive, non-essential tasks

Eliminated costs of temporary workers

#### REQUIREMENTS

- The ability to reduce time spent on the clerical functions of sorting, routing, retrieving, paying, and filing invoices.
- A means to collect, organize, and present disparate file types electronically as an integrated element of the work process.

#### SOLUTION

#### The Global 360 Answer

With the Global 360 solution, all paper processing disappears. All invoices, as well as other payables documents, are now handled within the imaging system.

Global 360 enables the automatic collection of all information and documentation relevant to a particular invoice into a "virtual folder," creating a single view—no matter where the files or data are stored. This folder may contain references to workflow work items, any number of diverse file types such as scanned documents (JPG and TIFF), Microsoft®

Word documents, Adobe PDF Files, and HTML Links, as well as any e-mails in external repositories. All the information needed to process an invoice is readily accessible and available, yet tailored to an Accounts Payable staff member's privileges. (This security is established by using Roles and Access Control Lists that can determine the extent to which users are allowed to access the content). Access to aggregated data and processes is intuitive and obvious.

Collaboration on invoices is made simple by providing access to documents (files), tasks, deadlines, alerts, and threaded discussions. Users can maintain a running history of changes made and track the status of assigned tasks and deadlines to meet invoice payment deadlines.

#### **BENEFITS:**

- PO's and receivers from disparate systems can now be matched both systematically and automatically. Invoices meeting pre-defined dollar and/or percentage tolerances will automatically be approved for payment.
- Manual processes are eliminated.
- Invoices no longer have to be input manually into the AP Systems before being sent for Exception Handling, Approval, or GL codes.
- There is no longer a need to file any AP documentation. All documents can be searched and viewed by approved personnel for audits, vendor inquiries, and other necessary tasks.
- All related invoice documentation is consolidated into a single view and is instantly accessible and organized.
- Users get the information they need, when they need it, to process invoices efficiently.
- Document hand-off between users is efficient and automated.

# PROCESS/WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

- Lack of automation, highly manual processes
- Processing bottlenecks
- Lack of visibility or tracking capabilities
- Invoices are delayed or lost in the approval hand-offs
- No systematic way to prioritize invoice processing

The sheer number of invoices that a company must process on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis is daunting—the average AP staff member processes 2651 invoices per month, each with twenty to thirty fields-worth of information that needs to be entered to process a single invoice. Accounts Payable processes are labor-intensive and complex



with numerous steps, reviews, and touch-points. In order to pay an invoice, the Accounts Payable staff will have to involve many stakeholders, including the vendor, the managers who made the purchase, and Accounts Receivable, among others. Because of this, opportunities for mishaps, lag-times, errors, and miscommunications are the norm. Invoices are often sent directly to department managers, where they may sit ignored on desks for days and weeks at a time. AP does not know about the liability until it physically receives the invoice, which could be anywhere from just days before it's due or, in many cases, after its due date. In addition, the AP department often loses complete control of any invoice that must be forwarded out of their department to for approval. Once sent, there is no way to know whether the approver is out of the office or just busy with other projects. It can take days or weeks to get the invoice approved and back to AP.

#### REQUIREMENTS

- A robust but easy-to-use business process management system that enables work to be organized, prioritized, managed, and tracked.
- An Accounts Payable-specific workflow template that accelerates deployment and leverages industry best practices.

#### **SOLUTION**

The Global 360 Answer Global 360 offers a solution that automates many Accounts Payable work steps and executes workflow as defined by the organization. The Global 360 solution automates the distribution of the invoices to be processed as well as the order in which they are worked on. Workflow is trackable at any given time to ensure the correct sequences of work steps are being followed and invoices can be routed and prioritized for payment based on invoice type, favorable terms negotiated, vendor, dollar amount, or any additional key criteria. Exceptions handling is also streamlined in the Global 360 solution—invoice anomalies are automatically identified and routed for additional auditing.

The Global 360 Accounts Payable template ensures that invoices are only approved by someone with an appropriate level of authority as predefined by the role-based security. If the invoice is for goods or services from several cost centers, and if the organization desires that individuals within each of those cost centers approve it, Global 360 enables multiple approval processing. The invoice can be forwarded to a sequence of approvers who can "stamp" the invoice and then the final reviewer, or approver, can apply an approved stamp. Global 360 has the ability to enable parallel approvals in cases where an invoice must be approved by multiple people in no particular order.

Utilizing Global 360's solutions, approvers can make any necessary changes, add their approval signatures, and enter GL coding directly onto the invoice. Approved invoices are sent back to the appropriate processor instantly (again using predefined business rules), and approved invoices are systematically sent to AP for payment.

Because many AP process steps are automated and all related documentation is consolidated, Accounts Payable staff can reduce processing time while simultaneously increasing volume. For many of Global 360's customers, this means hundreds of thousands of dollars in discounts can now be taken that might otherwise have been wasted. In addition, staff can focus on quality, auditing, and exception handling vs. repetitive clerical tasks, making the role of Accounts Payable more strategic, and shifting it from transaction-oriented and reactive tasks to analytical and proactive ones.

# Accounts Payable The key advantages of the Global 360 solution include:

**Control:** Accounts Payable automation process workflow is determined —including manual and fully automated tasks—with drag and drop/point and click functionality. The rules for how processes will be executed, and who will perform the steps within the Accounts Payable process, are easily created. Process Simulators provide an environment for modeling process design and anticipating results.

**Ease of Use:** Non-technical Accounts Payable staff are able to define processes using graphical models of the workflow that are then executed by the Process Manager. Workflows can be created using the user-friendly, graphical modeling environment, or the pre-built Accounts Payable template.

Integration: The BPM solution communicates directly with the underlying applications as well as content input (such as integration with scanner interfaces, for example). The Accounts Payable BPM template provides integration work steps via Web Services and MQ for external systems such as SAP and PeopleSoft.

#### **BENEFITS**

- Organizations can automate their approval of routine invoices, check requests and manage expenses. They can also prioritize work according to predefined business rules so that AP staff can focus on the key aspects of payables that require their expertise and realize a faster AP cycle time.
- Invoices are automatically routed to the right people for review and approval, including any supporting records and documentation, all according to predefined business rules and process roles



# **CUSTOMER PROCESS EXAMPLE: CIBA**

CIBA's G360 design leveraged Peoplesoft functionality as well as an e-mail approval function, an online signature authorization database for appropriate accounting control, and an automated tickler file for invoices pending approval.

# **Process Steps:**

AP mail coordinator scans invoices into G360. Indexing is by Peoplesoft Business Unit, Vendor Name, and priority flag.

Documents are automatically routed to the appropriate AP Administrator's worklist who works the invoice from a split screen that displays the G360 image and the PS purchase order transaction.

The AP clerk clicks a button to screen scrape attributes from PS to G360. If the invoice is consistent with the PO and does not require additional approval, the forward button routes the vouchered invoice to archive.

If the invoice cannot be vouchered, the AP Administrator selects the appropriate entry from a reason list and uses the Hold action. G360 automatically generates e-mail with the selected reason in a text message, attaches a copy of the image, sends the e-mail to the recipient and routes the original invoice to the Hold Queue to await the reply.

The recipient reads the e-mail, views the invoice copy, and documents approval in a Reply to the AP Administrator.

Nightly, a scheduled G360 task matches completed invoices retained in a Hold Queue to the Peoplesoft voucher and sends the imaged document to the G360 library for future retrieval.

A second scheduled task searches for original invoices that have been in the Hold Queue for more than five days and have not been vouchered in PeopleSoft. It automatically returns these invoices to the AP Administrator's worklist for follow-up.

- Organizations can focus on core business goals by eliminating non-value-added functions and reducing manual intervention and exception processing through greater automation.
- Tracking invoice-processing status is simple and instantaneous while post processing auditing easy to manage.

# **BUSINESS OPTIMIZATION**

#### **CHALLENGES**

#### Most AP departments find it difficult to:

- Determine a strategic timing and order of invoice payment
- Get real-time reports on spend analysis/payables
- Check performance benchmarks for the AP process in real time
- Track all liabilities in a time-sensitive manner by accurately measuring throughput
- View all outstanding liabilities at any point in time
- Gain visibility into spending that enables a more strategic approach and provides leverage in contract negotiations

#### REQUIREMENTS

Business optimization, which includes analytics, simulation, and goal management capabilities, enables a 360-degree, view into the relationship with a given vendor and all of the information related to the invoice. It also takes into account the organization's cash management strategy and current cash position. Armed with this information, Accounts Payable staff can make the best and most strategic decision pertaining to an invoice and ensure that their actions support organizational objectives.

# SOLUTION

Business Optimization Through Simulation, Modeling, and Goal Management

Accounts Payable managers can use Global 360 Business Optimization to evaluate processes and trends, as well as to identify the most advantageous process models to leverage. Goal management capabilities enables them to link their organizational objectives with the business rules that drive their processes. Departmental mandates can automatically drive operations, tactics, and actions within a workflow process.

#### Example:

Determining the order of invoices to be processed and the timing of payment takes into account many factors and key data points, including preferred vendor status, discount rates, and negotiated payment terms. At a more strategic



level, however, determining the best approach from a cash management perspective is also key: sometimes paying an invoice early and taking a discount is advantageous, while other times paying later (and forfeiting the discount) to keep cash on hand is a more strategic approach. These different scenarios can be modeled and simulated in real-time to plan the best approach.

# Reporting and Analysis

Accounts Payable reporting enables more strategic spending and provides leverage in contract negotiations. AP employees are in a good position to collect information about how much the firm is buying and from whom—vital information that can lead to shifts in vendors and spending patterns. Additionally, the responsibility Accounts Payable has for accurate Accounts Payable reporting in financial statements, and for the establishment, maintenance, and enforcement of controls mandated by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, extends through delegation to AP managers.

# Useful reports include:

- Peer comparisons
- Backlog, holdover, and throughput
- Inquiries, rejects, and errors
- Vendor information and stratification
- Historical spend analysis
- Transaction number by vendor
- Dollars spent per transaction

Accounts Payable teams can track and measure processes and trends both to gain intelligence about their operations as well as to detect current and historic business opportunities or problems. Managers can make informed decisions because they are presented with the issues that need to be addressed within their context, allowing them to take the right action. Managers have the ability to "drill down" into an anomaly or pain point and look at the information from many different dimensions, giving them greater understanding of the "information behind the information." Forecasting is made possible through ongoing statistical data capture.

#### Management Dashboard

Dashboards give process owners easy access to analysis that is both actionable and contextual (not to mention specific and targeted). Process analytics give account payable managers the ability to track and measure performance based on real-time feedback, giving them true insight into an organization and its operations. Up-to-the-moment statistics about productivity, workloads, goal attainment,

# **MANAGEMENT VISIBILITY & CONTROL**

# Monitoring of invoice status

- · Current status of goal attainment
- History of goal attainment over last month
- Drill down by invoice value
- Overall invoice processing times
- Drill down by specific process stages Decision and Research

and process anomalies enable complete visibility and organizational control. Measurement of these processes as they are executed provides the necessary information for understanding how each element of an Accounts Payable process is performing, and how it can be improved. Analytics capabilities provide visibility into the effectiveness and efficiencies of an entire Accounts Payable process. With management dashboards and integrated analytics, executives and managers can find inefficiencies in their Accounts Payable processes quickly.

#### **BENEFITS**

## Accounts Payable departments can:

- Run real-time reports on spend analysis, payables, status of specific invoices, and performance benchmarks for the AP process in real time
- Track all liabilities in a time-sensitive manner by accurately measuring throughput, and be able to view all outstanding liabilities at any point in time
- Gain visibility that enables more strategic spending and provides leverage in contract negotiations
- Determine the most advantageous payment plan for invoices at any given point in time

# THE VALUE OF TEMPLATES

Customizing BPM solutions to meet specific application requirements represents an investment in time and resources for most organizations. While 80 percent of a process is typically standard within a particular industry, the other 20 percent of the process is unique to an individual organization, and provides that organization with real value, intellectual capital, and competitive differentiation. This is where the templates come in: they go beyond rapid process application development environments to offer template applications



targeted toward organization-specific recurrent processes. While all BPM applications will require some customization, the extent of this customization and the time to deployment can be reduced significantly.

## The Global 360 Solution Templates

Global 360's business process templates are based on the best practices of the most successful companies in their respective industries. The Global 360 Accounts Payable Solution Template provides workflows with defined capture, processing, and integration worksteps for integration via Web Services and MQ to external systems such as SAP and PeopleSoft. Each workflow can be further customized for specific processing and integration requirements. In addition to the workflows, each template provides a set of user applications and sample process management dashboards.

#### THE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE TEMPLATE

- Leverages Global 360's 2000+ customer best practices in prebuilt AP workflow maps
- Incorporates key Accounts Payable industry standards and benchmarks in modeling and simulation functions
- Modifies and edits workflow and integration to meet unique requirements

#### **BENEFITS**

- Speed: organizations can get up and running with BPM in no time, saving time and resources in BPM deployments
- Rapid time-to-benefit through less development and shorter deployment time
- Low implementation costs
- Best Practices of peers/industry are leveraged
- Ability to respond to changing market conditions quickly

"Consider agile BPM templates if you want to cut time to market and cost, while retaining business uniqueness."

Jim Sinur, Gartner
Business Process Management Suites Will
Be The 'Next Big Thing',
Gartner Research Note, 8 February 2005

# **CONCLUSION**

Global 360 has enabled numerous Accounts Payable customers to greatly improve operations by reducing processing times, streamlining processes, and ensuring all related information is accessible, while providing complete visibility into vendor transactions and cash positions.

Global 360 customers have been able to deploy accurate, streamlined, and efficient Accounts Payable processing that includes:

- Automated collection/organization/ management and tracking of required documents
- Automated work distribution, prioritization, and management
- Business optimization and management abilities that enable the implementation of a claims management strategy
- Better manage cash, strategically avoiding real costs (penalties) as well as opportunity costs (failure to obtain discounts)
- Focus on higher value tasks such as quality assurance, contract, and policy compliance, as well as reporting and analysis for process improvement.
- Leverage greater predictability of cash flow

Through the development of the Global 360 Accounts Payable Solution Template, customers can see even greater advantages with an expedited deployment, lower implementation costs, and rapid pay back. Global 360 also provides templates for Credit Claims, Compliance, and Customer Correspondence. To find out more, please visit www.global360.com.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

- 1. To schedule a demo of the Accounts Payable Demo, Please e-mail: Colleen\_Nichols@global360.com
- To find out more about the Global 360 Accounts
   Payable Solution Template visit: http://www.
   global360.com/solutions/template/accountspayable
- To see an overview of the Global 360 BPM Solution, please visit: http://www.global360.com/ company/resource\_library/default.asp?campaign\_ id=global360\_bpm.pdf

